

ASK THE TIC

INSPECTION CERTIFICATES FOR U.S. EXPORT PRODUCTS

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Trade Development

Inspection certificates are often required by foreign customs or businesses for certain regulated products, often relating to agriculture, health, or the environment. Inspection certificates may also be required to ensure that vessels or crates are free of contaminants before entering certain ports. Certificates are issued by various agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, or the Food & Drug Administration, depending on the product being exported.



WHAT ARE THE VARIOUS TYPES OF INSPECTION CERTIFICATES USED IN EXPORTING U.S. PRODUCTS?

Agricultural Exports

Several U.S. Department of Agriculture agencies provide inspection services when certificates are required to clear imported agricultural products through overseas customs.

Plants

Most countries require a certificate to import plants and plant products (trees, seeds, mulch). The Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) conducts inspections and issues "phytosanitary" certificates indicating the tree or plant being exported is free of pests. The certificates are issued by state and local offices, listed online at www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq/sphd.html. These state offices also maintain information on import regulations in each country. Inspections can also be done at ports.

Animals and Animal By-Products

Live animals also fall under the purview of APHIS, under Veterinary Services (www.aphis.usda/vs). Certain foreign governments have quarantine or health requirements for arriving animals. People transporting animals abroad are advised to contact the appropriate embassy, governmental agency, or consulate at least 4 weeks in advance. Additional airline requirements also exist for international flights. These rules may require additional ventilation, labeling and a shipper's certification. Airlines should be contacted for further information. More country-specific information on exporting live animals is available at www.aphis.usda.gov/guidance/regulations/animal/

For animal by-products (such as hides, pet foods, semen), exporters should contact the APHIS veterinarian in their

area. A listing of these veterinarians can be found at www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/vsoffice2.html.

For more information about APHIS services, visit them at www.aphis.usda.gov

Meat and Poultry

When required by foreign governments, the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) provides export inspections and certification for meat and poultry. Exporters initiate an application for inspection and when the inspector has received all pertinent information, including any additional documentation required for the specific transaction, he will perform the inspection at the exporting establishment. If the inspector is satisfied with the inspection and verifies the foreign language sticker and labeling, he will sign the application, issue the export certificate and number and permit the establishment to stamp the product. Subsequently, a certifying official receives the completed export certificate and a copy of the certified application from the exporter to verify and sign. Export requirements vary by product and country, so exporters of meat and poultry products should consult FSIS' online library which houses this information at www.fsis.usda.gov/OFO/export/explib.htm. For additional assistance, call the FSIS Technical Service Center Export Staff at (402) 221-7400.

Grain

For exporters, the Federal Grain Inspection Service (FGIS) provides inspections under the U.S. Grain Standards Act (USGSA) and the Agricultural Marketing Act (AMA) and conducts mandatory inspections for all exported grain. Products examined by FGIS include rice, peas, beans, lentils, all grain and grain-based processed products. Anyone exporting 15,000 tons or more (per year) of grain covered by the USGSA must first register with FGIS. The registration process involves submitting a form and paying a fee. The registration requirement does not apply to AMA commodities. Exporters may call the Compliance Division at (202) 720-8262 for additional assistance. You may register with FGIS online at www.usda.gov/gipsa/oversight/reqreq.htm

FGIS is also required to certify the quality and weight of all export shipments of grain covered by the USGSA. Exceptions include grain exports under 15,000 tons per year by any individual, grain exported for seeding purposes, grain shipped in bond, grain exported by rail or truck to Canada or Mexico and grain not sold by grade. In addition, all corn exports must be tested for aflatoxin by FGIS unless the buyer and seller agree to have the corn tested by an entity other than FGIS, or to bypass testing. Contact the Policies and Procedures Branch at (202) 720-0252 for more information. More information about FGIS is available at www.usda.gov/gipsa.

Other Agricultural Certificates

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) offers a variety of fee-based, voluntary product, production process and equipment certification services that provide independent, third-party assurance that contractual or foreign government requirements are met. Grading services for livestock and poultry products, fruits and vegetables, cotton, dairy products and tobacco ensure that agricultural products meet U.S. grade standards or other product standards. Process verification services assure customers that production processes meet identified requirements.

Dairy and meat processing equipment certification assures that equipment has been designed to meet hygienic standards. For more information on AMS, please visit www.ams.usda.gov/index.htm

Consumer safety offices and trade specialists in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Inspection Services Division offer a range of services to assist U.S. fishing industry businesses that export fish and fishery products. Besides inspecting and certifying products for export, program officers advise seafood marketers about foreign regulations and maintain contact with foreign government regulatory agencies to resolve sanitary-hygienic issues. NOAA is an active participant in international activities that promote and facilitate the trade of fishery products. For more information, visit <http://seafood.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

Environmental Exports

For countries that require a certificate for pesticide products, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will issue a "Gold Seal" certificate certifying that a pesticide is registered in the United States and available in the U.S. market. To obtain a Gold Seal Certificate, contact the EPA at (703) 305-5446 to speak with an EPA product manager for your specific product. You need to provide your EPA pesticide registration number.

Food and Drug Exports

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), at the request of U.S. exporters, will issue export certificates for certain human drugs and biological products, animal drugs, medical devices, food products, dietary supplements, cosmetics and animal-derived products for shipment to the European Union (EU). Several types of certificates are issued.

Pre-Shipment Inspections

"Pre-shipment inspections" (PSI) are sometimes required when mandated by the government of the importing country. Countries requiring PSI claim they are needed to ensure a fair price, prevent substandard goods from entering the country, or deflect attempts to avoid payment of customs duties. The cost of these inspections is usually borne by the importer, although exporters sometimes incur costs due.



WHAT ARE SOME OTHER CERTIFICATIONS OR INSPECTION REQUIREMENTS EXPORTERS MIGHT BE REQUIRED TO MEET?

By the year 2004, an estimated half of U.S. exports to the European Union (EU) will require the CE mark, indicating that a company has met certain health, safety and environmental requirements. The CE mark functions as a "passport" to circulate industrial products freely within the internal market of the EU. Manufacturers in the EU and abroad must affix the CE mark to those products covered by the relevant directives. Once a product receives the CE mark, it can be marketed throughout the EU without undergoing further product modification.

Australia has stringent sanitary and phytosanitary restrictions affecting imports of fresh fruit, vegetables, meat and poultry products. Under Australia's new quarantine and inspection process, imported agricultural commodities must have an import risk analysis (IRA) to determine a commodity's risk of introducing pests and diseases into Australia. All produce should have an Australian import permit and a U.S. phytosanitary certificate. The import permit can be requested from the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (formerly DPIE) in Canberra, or from the appropriate State Departments of Agriculture located in the Australian state capitals. The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) has a detailed import conditions database on its web site at www.aqis.gov.au/ under "Quarantine and Inspection." Also on this site are Australian labeling requirements for imported packaged food, requirements for animals and animal products, documents for public comment, fee schedules, forms etc.

The TIC has authored several articles that give more comprehensive information on several of the aforementioned topics. To see a list of them, please visit the Export America web site <http://exportamerica.doc.gov> or go directly to the TIC web site www.export.gov/tic and click on "Answers to Your Export Questions." ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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The Trade Information Center (TIC) is operated by the International Trade Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce for the 19 federal agencies comprising the Trade Promotion Coordinating Committee. These agencies are responsible for managing the U.S. Government's export promotion programs and activities. You, too, can "Ask the TIC" by calling 1-800-USA-TRAD(E) toll free, Monday through Friday, 8:30-5:30 EST. Or visit the TIC's website at www.export.gov/tic.